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REALITY BITES: DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND REALISM IN ARCHITECTURE

The birth of photography in the first decades of the XIX century paralleled the exodus of rural populations to urban centers and the emergence of the industrial city. Eventually, photography replaced painting as the preferred mode of representation for the human landscape, coinciding with this shift from a rural to an urban perception of the environment. Architects immediately detected the potential of the new medium as a vehicle to promote their work, but also -because of its aura of objectivity- as a source of images with which they could buttress their arguments. Consequently, it is now almost impossible to dissociate some of the most heated polemics in the field of architecture and art history from the images that were used to support them, serving as true instruments of propaganda.

Because of this capacity to lend a certain materiality to ideas, photographs have been consistently used by architects to project their obsessions in their search for a new architecture. At the beginning of the XX century, European architects used images of American industry and progress in order to forward their technologic utopias. After WWII, the destruction facilitated by technologic development and totalitarian thought influenced many architects as they turned towards images of the quotidian in search for a more democratic architecture. Renouncing the possibility of a *tabula rasa,* they approached the ways of life of the people as source material for building a more participative and open society.

Here started a long and fruitful exchange between photographic and architectural realisms, which has marked a considerable portion of the production of both disciplines over recent decades. Documentary photography, with its discrete categories (the sample, the series, the archive…), has been instrumental for architects and artists in their negotiating issues of individual and collective identity -a concern that is coincident with democratic societies.

The seminar will take the structure of a case study: specific episodes of special intensity of exchange between photography and architecture will be examined in an attempt to unravel their cultural significance and their impact on both disciplines.

Starting with New Brutalism and its obsession with image*,* the course will subsequently examine Venturi and Scott Brown's use of photography as influenced by artists Edward Ruscha and Stephen Shore. A similar genealogy will be studied in the context of Italian *Neorealismo*, where the work of Aldo Rossi will be studied in parallel with the films of Michelangelo Antonioni as representatives of a late form of Italian realism. In the German-speaking world special attention will be paid to the influence of Bernd and Hilla Becher and the serial and *sachlich* logic of their work in the Berliner projects of architects such as Ungers or Kollhoff. Additionally, the early work of Herzog & de Meuron will be studied through their relationship with the photographers of the Düsseldorf School. Finally, the seminar will focus on the collaboration of London based architects Caruso St John with the artist Thomas Demand.

These and other cases will be studied not only from a historical perspective, but mainly in order to find strategies for intellectually engaging the existing city in innovative and meaningful ways. Retracing the above mentioned lineages will enable us to realize and enunciate the potentials of such an exchange between photography and architecture for a contemporary project.